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TRISTAN AND ISOLDE.

“That tremendous love-duo, sustained at the supreme altitude of emotion, where . . . the hero and heroine ‘lose themselves in the Nirvana of love . . . dissolve into their common soul, which, vast and unfathomable, seems to them the soul of the whole universe.’”







A · DAY · WITH  
RICHARD  
WAGNER  
BY · MAY · BYRON



NEW YORK  
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*In the same Series.*

*Mozart.*

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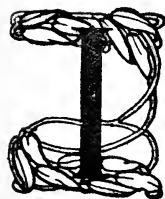
*Tschaikovsky.*

*Grieg.*

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## A DAY WITH WAGNER.



It is before six o'clock on a July morning in 1873, when Richard Wagner rises to devote several hours to work: for he has an incurable passion for hard work, and is more than eager every day to resume the labours of yesterday. No one is allowed to enter the room where he sits, with a glass of wine before him on the table: his spare, agile form clothed in garb of amazing colour and construction. His sensitive skin, which shudders involuntarily at the touch of cotton, is invariably clad in silk attire, and he delights to indulge in the most rococo combinations of design. His present dressing-gown is of quilted pink satin with a lighter satin lining, and stuffed with eiderdown, with an extra padded ruching inserted all round. If this is not warm enough for chilly mornings,

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Wagner puts on a heavy lined fur cloak instead. And he is utterly at a loss without three indispensable articles—his velvet cap, his spectacles, and his snuff box.

*On dit* that bright, not to say gaudy colours, and flamboyant designs, exhilarate and inspire Wagner, and moreover, that he changes his dress and the upholstery of his surroundings to suit the peculiar character of whatever opera he is engaged upon. Be that as it may, many of his greatest works have been composed without these external stimulants ; in poverty, discomfort, exile, and obloquy. If ever a man, by strenuous toil and resolute persistence in the face of all obstacles, earned the right to indulge his fads and fancies, it is Richard Wagner. By long and stormy ways in the pursuit of an incalculable ideal, he has come to his own at last : and some slight indulgence in the “eccentricities of genius” may now be freely accorded him.

The room itself in which he works is equally indicative of Wagner's own avowal that he is “by nature luxurious, prodigal, and

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extravagant, much more than Sardanapalus and all the old Emperors put together . . . better qualified to squander sixty thousand francs in six months than to earn it." This room apparently represents his *beau-idéal* of a library, work-room and reception - room combined. Large and spacious, fitted so as to afford possibilities of the most brilliant lighting, with wall-lamps and chandeliers: filled with rich furniture, with gorgeous curtains and hangings — silks, satins, damasks, velvets: its shelves of musical scores, and of books innumerable, testify to Wagner's personal *penchants* as regards authors and musicians. His literary library is unusually well-stocked and well-chosen. Few visitors to the villa have encountered its equal. Himself a poet and dramatist, he has a fine collection of poetical and dramatic works: many being translations, for Wagner is not a good linguist. History, mythology, philosophy, occupy considerable space: his own treatises and essays on the philosophy and theory of music are represented also. Volumes on various erudite and recondite subjects, far beyond the ordinary reader, evince the composer's wide scope and eclectic tastes: and volumes of orchestral and

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operatic works proclaim his special predilections in the "tone-art"—notably, and paramount, his worship of Beethoven, an admiration bordering on fanaticism. "I do not recall clearly," he has written, "what I was intended to become, but I remember that one evening I heard a Beethoven symphony for the first time, that I had an attack of fever thereafter, and that, when I had recovered, I had become a musician. This may explain why, although in course of time I became familiar with other beautiful music, I still loved and worshipped Beethoven above all. I ceased to know any other pleasure but that of immersing myself in the depths of his genius, until I came to imagine myself a part of him." But, besides Beethoven, Wagner has a profound admiration for that greatest master of musical thought, that inexhaustible well of beauty, Sebastian Bach. "How warm, how healthy and natural is his music," says he, "how full of feeling,—what strange cries in it now and then!" Mozart also occupies a lofty pinnacle in his mind, "the glorious master with his incomparable dramatic talent" . . . . "I believe in God, Mozart, Beethoven," was Wagner's early *credo*. Last, and by no means



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least, his love of Weber is manifested in a collection of various works by that insufficiently appreciated genius. It has been remarked that "the composer in whom Wagner's music really has its roots, is not Beethoven, but Weber." He himself has acknowledged his indebtedness, in his article on *The Music of the Future*. "Should I be granted the satisfaction of seeing my *Tannhäuser* well received by the Paris public . . . . I should owe this success in a large measure to the very noticeable connection of this opera with those of my predecessors, amongst whom I specially call attention to Weber."

It is, in quantity, therefore, not a very extended répertoire, musically speaking, which figures upon Wagner's library shelves: it owes all to quality. The conspicuous absence of certain great names is due to his strongly-marked idiosyncrasies. Richard Wagner has never been one to follow the multitude in obeisance to any artistic fame: he has chosen either to lead popular opinion, or to ignore it.

Around him, as he sits so diligently transcribing "thoughts that breathe and words that

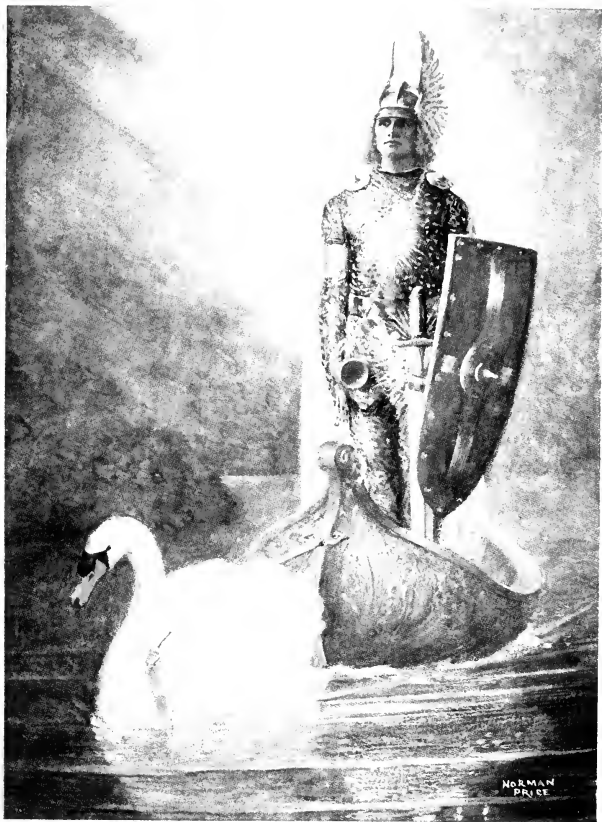
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burn," a score of friendly eyes look down. The lofty walls are hung with portraits. Here his mother, there his wife Cosima,—his patron King Ludwig, his friend Liszt, his idol Beethoven; Schiller, and Goethe, and Schopenhauer, and others endeared to him by intellect or friendship. A splendid Steinway grand piano occupies one corner of the room: and mention must not be omitted of a magnificent dog which lies stretched in sympathetic silence at his master's feet: for Wagner, whether he walks, or writes, or rests, is never unaccompanied by a dog, and he insists that his beloved "Peps" helped him to compose *Tannhäuser*, by howling most vociferously, with his eyes peering deep into his master's, whenever the music went against the grain with him. Whereupon Wagner would reconstruct it. . . . The man has a perfect passion for animals: he is contemplating writing a "History of My Dogs." And it is noteworthy that, wherever possible in his operas, he introduces animals: as a matter of fact, the *Meister-singer*, *Tristan*, and the *Fliegende Holländer* are the only plots in which they do *not* occur. Often they are associated with particularly beautiful and significant music: as will be

LOHENGRIN IS BROUGHT BY THE SWAN.

“The violins, in high harmonic positions, in the key of A, ‘which is the purest for strings and the most magic in effect,’ always announce the approach of Lohengrin, as the Swan glides up with the mysterious Knight.







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remembered by those who are familiar with the swans in *Lohengrin* and *Parsifal*, and the bird and the Dragon in *Siegfried*—wherein a bear also appears. In *Rienzi* and *Tannhäuser*, *Walküre* and *Götterdämmerung*, there are horses : and amongst other creatures in various operas, may be enumerated a dove, a ram, a toad, a snake, ravens, and hunting-dogs. In short, Wagner's love of animals has been coupled with his stubborn honesty and uncompromising purpose, as the most prominent traits in his character.

In personal appearance there is nothing about the great operatic composer to indicate the immense resources of his intellect, and the abundant love and happiness which he is capable of feeling. A man of barely middle height, and of no particular presence, his most pronounced features are a massive—almost too massive—forehead, and an obstinate chin. The latter to some extent contradicts the expressive serenity of his eyes, and the refinement of his mouth. His hair and whiskers are but slightly touched with grey ; but his face is lined with past pains, for Wagner has suffered all his life.

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Not only have repeated failures, perpetual frustrations, troubles financial, artistic and domestic, set their mark upon him: he has been since childhood the victim of erysipelas, heart-trouble, dyspepsia, and insomnia, — the latter maladies probably produced by continual sedentary work. Really good health he has never known: nor, indeed, are his habits conducive to it. He does not over-eat or over-drink or over-smoke: but he is a veritable slave to snuff: and, like many other men of genius, he has to pay the penalty of inordinate work at inordinate hours, in a ruined digestion and an impaired temper.

In speaking of work, it must be remembered that Wagner has imposed upon himself a colossal task,—one which no previous composer has attempted,—in combining the art of the poet with that of the musician,—in regarding an opera as a co-ordinate whole; words, music, orchestration all simultaneously conceived and produced, inseparable. Wagner is wont to compare poetry to a husband and music to a wife,—thus, to a certain extent, subordinating the feminine element to the masculine,—where-



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as the reverse has hitherto always been the case: the music has occupied the position of the "predominant partner." And, in order to accomplish his ends in this union, his method of creating a "music-drama" is in the highest degree systematic. He does not dog the heels of a desultory inspiration, but maps out with clear purpose and insight the progress and culmination of his work. His usual plan is this: first, to select a subject, and rough out the plot in prose. This subject-matter is to some extent pre-determined for him: for, as he has declared, Love is the main subject of all the dramas he has ever written, from the *Fliegende Hollander* to *Parsifal*. Love, human or divine—love, triumphant or despairing—love, in selfishness or in self-sacrifice: love, regarded, according to Schopenhauer's theory, as "the highest of all moral and hygienic laws." The solitary rival which he permits to this all-powerful passion is gold,—and that only as evidenced in the misshapen dwarf Alberich of the *Rheingold*. Look back in memory upon the Wagnerian stories; you will perceive that love is imminent and immanent from the very outset. "All his heroes and heroines," it has

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been said, "fall in love at their first meeting,—or before." And it will also be evident that in almost every case the woman is ready to sacrifice her life, if need be, for the lover. Hers is the final and the noblest joy, the joy of self-renunciation. Senta and Vanderdecken, Elizabeth and Tannhäuser, Elsa and Lohengrin,—Eva and Walter, Siegmund and Sieglinde, Siegfried and Brünnhilde,—here, indeed, is a glorious pageantry of true lovers such as you shall not match in all the world: and, last and greatest of them, Tristan and Isolde, lovers *par excellence*, whose story is, in Wagner's words, "the simplest of musical conceptions, but full-blooded; with the black flag waving at the end:" or, as Liszt has put it, "something to weep over and flare up in enthusiasm. What ravishing magic! What an incredible wealth of beauty!" In *Tristan und Isolde*, "a poem for poets, a score for musicians," love with all its attributes, all its possibilities, its glory heightened to a more vivid glow against the lowering shadow of inevitable doom, finds its ultimate consummation of expression: above all in that tremendous love-duo, sustained at the supreme altitude of emotion, where "the orchestra

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becomes a perfect Oriental garden of fresh and fragrant melodies," and the hero and heroine "lose themselves," to quote Catulle Mendès, "in the Nirvana of Love . . . dissolve into their common soul, which, vast and unfathomable, seems to them the soul of the whole universe."

But we must return to the sedulous workman at his table. About nine o'clock, breakfast is brought in to him—separately from the rest of the household—and he swallows it hurriedly after his usual headlong fashion : his one idea is to get on with work. Having made a sketch in prose of the main lines of his plot, he proceeds to put it into verse, not without the most careful discrimination and selection, and having first thoroughly assured himself that the idea is full of latent success.

But he goes much further than this. "It would be quite impossible for me," he has stated, "to compose to an opera-*'book'* written by another person, and for this reason : it is not my way to choose a certain subject, elaborate it into verse, and then excogitate

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music suitable to accompany it. Indeed, such a method would put me under the disadvantage of having to be inspired twice by the same subject, which is impossible. My method is different from that. In the first place, no subjects attract me save such as present themselves to me as of simultaneous poetic and musical importance. Thus, before I begin to make a verse, or even to project a scene, I am already intoxicated by the musical fragrance of my task. I have all the tones, all the characteristic motives, in my hand, so that when the verses are finished and the scenes arranged, the opera is practically finished so far as I am concerned, and the detailed execution of the work is little more than a quiet after-labour, which has been preceded by the real moments of creation."

Wagner has for many years adhered to this conviction : he has expressed it with vehemence and certainty in his essay on Beethoven, where he demonstrates how even that mighty genius, incapable of expressing his highest inspirations in sound alone, invoked the aid of poetry for his *magnum opus* in the Ninth Symphony. In this, according to Wagner's theory, he returned

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to the original tradition of all nations, in which bard and singer, poet and minstrel, were one and the same : an ideal and natural condition of identity, which had suffered a temporary dislocation and divorce for some two hundred years. .

Owing to this plan of giving contemporaneous evolution to both words and sounds, of regarding both as the expression of the same emotion, —the verses, twin-born with the music, are almost finished before he commits them to paper : and the music, chiefly conceived upon his lonely walks, is also only waiting its final capture in actual black-and-white notation. Wagner's memory is of unparalleled power and magnitude : he can conduct, from memory alone, whole symphonies of his beloved Beethoven, every note in the complex scores visible and audible to his mind. And although he likes to have a piano in his room, so that, if necessary, he may re-mould and re-model to a certain extent, he cannot attempt to transfer to the limitations of the key-board the amazing architectonics of his piled-up score. Wagner thinks entirely in orchestral terms, and lives habitually in a region of orchestral colours ; merely using the piano as

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a very inadequate sketch-book to which he can have recourse when necessary.

He is at present engaged in working out his instrumental score from sketches on scraps of music-paper, written in pencil and almost illegible. It is a task detestable to his impatient and impetuous soul: yet, with one of those contradictions which are so characteristic of great men, his completed scores are as neat, clean, and presentable, as his rough jottings are wild and almost incomprehensible. Not a blot, not a blur, not an erasure, disfigures his eminently legible pages: and his writing itself is exceptionally good. "These scores," he has told Liszt, "will be my most finished master-works in caligraphy! . . . Meyerbeer, in former days, admired nothing in my scores more than the neat writing. This tribute of admiration has now become a curse to me: I *must* write neat scores as long as I live!" So that Wagner's *Reinschrift*, or clean copy, is a marvel of lucidity and elegance.

Yet what the compiling of this instrumental score must mean, in severe manual labour no

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less than in brain work, only he can realize who himself is an orchestral writer. No one else can possibly comprehend the innumerable transpositions and super-positions and juxtapositions, the questions of balance, and colour, and combination, which go to the building-up of an orchestral work : and above all, in such scores as Wagner's. "Any one who *does* comprehend it," as the composer Heinrich Dorn has exclaimed, "must be doubly astounded at this exhausting and colossal activity."

In the full score of *Die Walküre* alone, it has been calculated, there are at least a million notes,—that is, taking them in sequence,—not taking into account their incredible multitude of recapitulations or combinations, in the construction of the whole, bar by bar. Moreover, the orchestra, as employed by Wagner, is no longer the small select paint-box, so to speak, with which Mozart and Beethoven produced such noble effects. In Wagner's opinion, they had but narrow and meagre means at their disposal. He supplements, doubles, triples or quadruples the existing instruments in their various divisions : he adds new instruments,

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hitherto rigorously excluded from classic orchestras ; he invents unheard-of concatenations of sound, undreamed-of usages of tint and tone. Wholly original, unorthodox, unconventional, yet convinced of his own capacity, he bids the orchestra assume a rôle and an importance, which never in opera has been heretofore acceded to it. It is no longer treated, in his own phrase, as a big guitar to accompany arias. "He entrusts to it the function of revealing the soul, the passions, the feelings, even the most transient emotions, of his characters ; the orchestra becomes the echo, the transparent veil, through which we hear all their heart-beats : " whether, in the *Feuer-zauber* scene, to use the language of Saint-Saëns, " the violins flame, the harps crackle, the drums scintillate," around the wall of fire which hides Brünnhilde, or the two sets of forest horns, making answer to each other in different keys, descend into dreamy silence before the passionate embrace of Tristan and Isolde : whether the violins, in high " harmonic " positions, in the key of A, " which is the purest for strings and the most magic in effect," always announce the approach of Lohengrin,



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as the Swan glides up with the mysterious Knight ; or, in the introduction to the first act of *Die Walküre*, the rainstorm pelts and pours upon the roof of Hunding's hut, in the "agitated tremolos and runs of the violins," while the double-basses mutter growling thunder in the distance, until at last, in that clashing cataclysm of sound with which the storm rides in upon the full orchestra, appears that sinister and terrible motive identified with the Storm-God. Or again, when upon the chord of E-flat, rising and falling in long waves from the highest to the lowest octaves, the water-maidens of *Rheingold* become visible in their graceful play, and their song rocks like a cradle-song, in exquisite modulations, half-nonsense-words such as a cradle song might be, "*Weia, waga, woge du Welle.*" Nor is it only *en masse*, and in the depicting of a whole scene, as it progresses, that Wagner has led the way into a new tone-world whither henceforth so many shall hope to follow, whilst those "who come to scoff, remain to pray." He uses certain instruments to certain ends : and certain keys for certain purposes. In *Lohengrin*, for instance, he breaks through the monotonous "harp conventionality," which has

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always been used for portraying celestial matters, and takes, instead of harps—with infinitely thrilling effect—violins and wood-wind, in prolonged notes, in the highest positions. Ortrud is almost invariably indicated by the English horn, the bass-clarinet, and the key of F-sharp minor : Elsa by the high wood-wind : the King by the brass. All this, without mention being made of what is perhaps Wagner's most salient musical characteristic, or what strikes the lay mind as such,—the association of his *dramatis personæ* with certain definite melodies or motives. For he is the prophet, if not the inventor, of the *leit-motiv* and all subsequent developments which follow on it.

But now the morning has reached the hour of twelve : and the composer's long isolation is ended. His wife comes in, taking it for granted that he has worked long enough, and sits down to tell him the news of the day, to read his letters aloud to him, to listen to his enthusiastic projects, and write, at his dictation, some of the enormous multiplicity of letters which must be despatched. Cosima Wagner, the daughter of

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Liszt, is a perfect wife for the eccentric musician, whose first marriage was in all respects unhappy. She almost worships her husband, and delights to serve and wait upon his smallest wishes. She is full of intelligent sympathy for his art, and of loving indulgence to his weaknesses. He may cram the drawing-room, like the study, with irrelevant cascades of velvet, or unnecessary draperies of silk—for he has, as we have indicated already, “a passionate love for luminous stuffs that spread themselves like sheets of flame or fall in splendid folds.” He may garb himself in bizarre and almost ludicrous concoctions, such as a coat and trousers of golden satin embroidered with pearl flowers. Cosima Wagner knows the real honest heart at the back of all these ebullitions, and is aware that in his ideal German, Hans Sachs of *Der Meistersinger*, “the type of all that is noble and self-sacrificing in human nature,” her husband recognises many of his own best traits. There is only one thing which he will *not* sacrifice. All others if need be,—but not his dreams, his aspirations in art, for whose sake he has been content to endure so many years of privation, derision and disaster.

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“Happy the genius,” Wagner has declared, “on whom fortune has never smiled. Genius is so much unto itself! What more could fortune add? . . . When I am alone, and the musical fibres within me vibrate, and heterogeneous sounds form themselves into chords whence at last springs the melody which reveals to me my inner self: if then the heart in loud beats marks the impetuous rhythms, and rapture finds vent in divine tears through the mortal, no-longer-seeing eyes,—then do I often say to myself, what a fool you are not to remain always by yourself, to live only for these unique delights! . . . What can this public, with its most brilliant reception, offer you to equal in value even the one hundredth part of that holy rapture which comes from within?” But the vivid elation which supports him during the hours of work, sinks as suddenly as it rose; leaving him weary and flaccid as he lays down his pen after the prolonged and eager effort. To-day, indeed, he has not undergone the stress of emotion which he suffers during the actual throes of the creative impulse,—in which, as many great authors have done, he identifies himself absolutely with the characters of his story, and finds their joys and

ELIZABETH AND THE PASSING  
OF THE PILGRIMS.

“Elizabeth in her cruel and death-dealing disappointment when she sees that Tannhäuser is not among the company of the pilgrims returning from Rome.”









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sorrows reflected in himself. Such is frequently the case with Wagner. When he was engaged upon *Lohengrin*, he endured, as he has observed, "actual deep grief—which often found vent in scalding tears—when I realized the inevitable tragic necessity of the separation, the distraction of the two lovers." The composition of *Tannhäuser*, again, "acted upon me like real magic: whenever and wherever I took up my subject, I was all aglow and trembling with excitement . . . The first breath always transported me back into the fragrant atmosphere that had intoxicated me at its first conception." He revelled with Tannhäuser in the sensuous delights of the Venusberg,—shared with Wolfram his pure and noble ecstasy of devotion to Elizabeth,—agonized with Elizabeth in her cruel and death-dealing disappointment, when she sees that Tannhäuser is not among the company of the pilgrims returning from Rome. All these varied and poignant sensations inevitably end by plunging the composer, himself a mere medium for their expression, into a depth of reaction so profound as to be almost melancholia: in which he is capable of questioning whether indeed he has pursued some Fata

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Morgana of the intellect, and if he be merely the dupe of a monstrous vanity. But his present lassitude is more physical than mental : and the soothing influence of his wife is very sweet to him. Moreover, he has a healthy human appetite, and is by no means reluctant to betake himself, at one o'clock, into his richly-furnished dining-room, and to make a good dinner of roast meat, or preferably game : with a draught of good Rhine wine. "Your oatmeal gruel does not please me," he avers. "Game, while providing a maximum of nourishment, requires a minimum of digestive power : and it is imperative to gain strength through nourishment." After this, Wagner retires to his bedroom for an hour's siesta : by which means he restores his temporarily flagging energies, and re-appears, as alert as ever, in the course of the afternoon. There is now in evidence perhaps somewhat less of the genius, and somewhat more of the husband, father and friend ; and he visits his little son Siegfried in the morning,—the child for whom, and in celebration of his mother's birthday, he composed his refined and lovely *Siegfried Idyll* : "music as tender and melodious as Schubert's, and as full of the most

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exquisite charm as any part of his own music-dramas," written for a "diminutive orchestra consisting only of strings, wood-wind, one trumpet, and two horns." The old German lullaby, *Schlafe Kindchen*, is one of the main themes of this charming orchestral cradle-song: other subjects are taken from the score of *Siegfried*. Did Wagner, in presenting his little infant with this jewel-work of art, dream of some day to come when he should listen, may be, to sterner music; when, perhaps, he should, like his namesake Siegfried, forge his sword *Needful* upon the glowing anvil of life, among the deafening clangours of the smithy, and under the eyes of malevolent earth-folk? "The most beautiful of my life's dreams," Wagner has termed *Siegfried*, and it is the farthest removed from the old conventional operatic type. There is no chorus in it, throughout the concerted *ensemble*: there are never more than two persons on the stage at once. No female voice (with the exceptions of Erda and the Forest-Bird) is heard until almost the end. In short, we are there, as has been said, "transported to a new world which music alone makes possible."

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Friends begin to arrive one by one, and are warmly welcomed : for these *are* friends, staunch and loyal ones, and not such parasites as desire to crawl in under the shadow of a great name, or such “curious impertinents” as would poke and pry into the privacy of famous men. All that Wagner has ever craved for in human intercourse, “was *appreciation* : his only longing was to be *understood*.” And mere personal popularity is a matter more or less of indifference to him, so long as the children of his brain, his music-dramas, are valued and worshipped at their proper worth. For indiscriminate and ignorant homage to himself he has no use whatever. He complains bitterly, as so many other men of genius have complained, of the penalty which intellect must pay to intrusiveness. “What one of our class,” says he, “sacrifices, in his intercourse with all sorts of persons, utter strangers, — what annoyances and torments attend it,—no one else can have any conception of ; these tortures are the greater, because men who are our very antipodes believe that we are really like themselves, for they understand just as much in us as we have in common with them, and do not know how little, how very little—

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that is. . . . I make the most subtle arrangements to secure isolation, compel myself to be alone, and take pains to attain my object. . . . Talking, letter-writing, business complications,—these are my life-foes: undisturbed peaceful creativeness and work are, on the contrary, my life's preservers."

Yet, despite Wagner's protestations of preference for seclusion, he is naturally a companionable and gregarious man. Strangers are often agreeably surprised by the cordial and demonstrative delight with which he receives them: he is capable of dancing with joy and tossing up his cap like a boy, in sheer ebullience of enthusiasm. He has a curious, indefinable personal magnetism, exercised in apparent unconsciousness of its power, over all with whom he comes in contact. "When in his presence," said Herkomer, "you lose your own identity: you are sadly inclined to forget that there is something else in the world besides Wagner and his music. You are under an influence that sets every nerve at its highest key. . . . I doubt whether any man since Napoleon I. has been known to exercise such

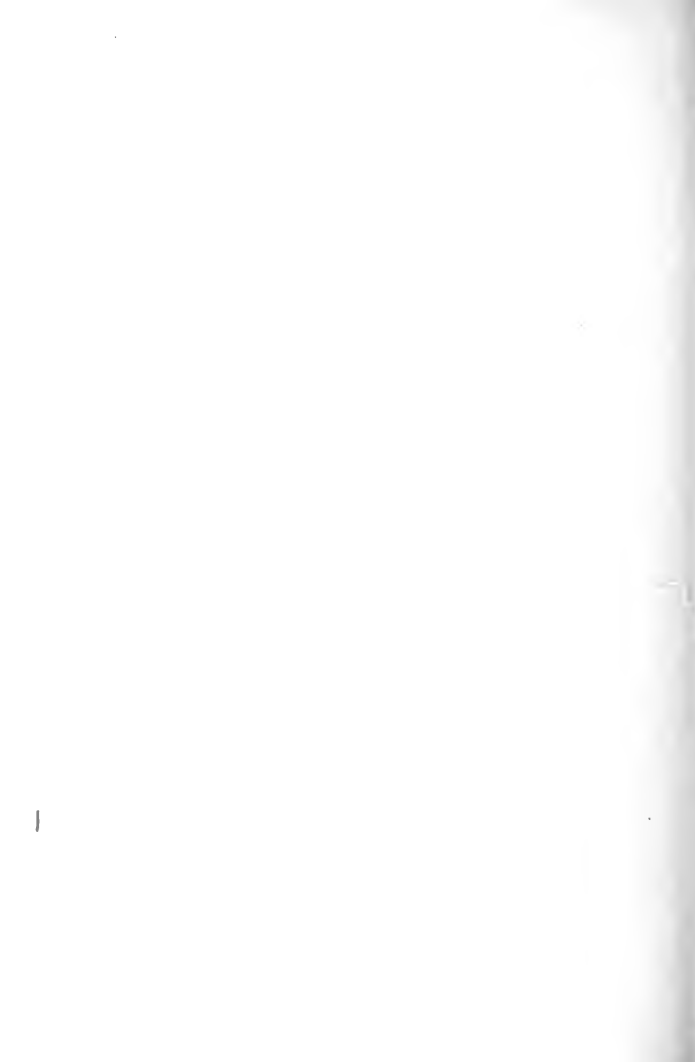
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powers of fascination over his admirers as Richard Wagner does daily." His face lights up with dignity and splendour, his eyes are luminous with excitement. Never still a moment, never seated, but always moving to and fro with quick nervous gestures,—sometimes searching for his *sine quâ non* the snuff-box, which has a constant trick of disappearing,—sometimes hunting after his spectacles, which may be in any recondite place, even to hanging on a chandelier,—sometimes pulling his velvet cap off and squeezing it to and fro as he speaks,—you might set down Wagner, were he other than he is, as a fussy, fidgety, nervously-excitable old man. But nobody ever regards him as this for a moment.

Every one is literally carried away, swept off the feet, by the flood of his eloquence, the imperious magic of his personality. He dominates every hearer, as he has dominated Fate and Fortune: and he talks, talks, talks, with illimitable vivacity and variety, upon every possible topic: while his guests are ready to laugh or weep at his bidding, to follow him to the wildest vistas of vision, to struggle after him to

SIEGFRIED FORGING HIS SWORD NEEDFUL.

“He should, like his namesake Siegfried, forge his sword *Needful* upon the glowing anvil of life, among the deafening clangours of the smithy, and under the eyes of malevolent earth-folk.”









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apparently unattainable heights of ecstasy, or to "caverns measureless to man" of the deepest philosophical speculations. And with all this he interblends the liveliest possible wit, and the most engaging mirthfulness,—playing all sorts of pranks, singing some amusing fragment such as the Cobbler's song from the *Meistersinger*, or roaring with laughter as he recites a humorous anecdote.

Those who have accused Wagner of unsociability, of professional jealousy, of selfish egotism and tactless *brusquerie*, can never have been admitted into the charmed circle of his home: or they would have fallen under the same spell which binds his friends in a league of what amounts to almost fanatical worship. Nor can they have realized that true democracy, one of his finest traits, which makes him as considerate and as courteous to a servant as to a "Highness," as polite to a cook as to a king. That he has a temper which in scope and size is on a level with his other mental attributes, an authentic composer's temper of the most volcanic type, nobody of course can gainsay. But this is a malady incident to many men

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who can plead no mitigating circumstances of insomnia, dyspepsia, over-work, over-worry and the facing of almost insuperable difficulties. Whilst, in Wagner's case, his eruptions of ungovernable rage are followed by a correspondingly great remorse, all that can be done to assuage or allay any pain he may have caused, he will do with a whole heart. And so little is his temper an integral part of his real character, that an expression of "infinite kindness, almost celestial kindness," is what most strikes some people on first meeting him. He is of the most keenly sympathetic disposition : so that it has been alleged, "He can never be perfectly happy,—because he will always have someone about him whose sorrow he must share."

As the afternoon passes on, the visitors severally depart. And the master of the house sits down, to find repose for a short interval in his favourite occupation of reading. Nothing affords him more peace and contentment than to lose himself in some fine book. Peace settles down upon his restless limbs and feverish brain : "an expression of incomparable tender-

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ness hovers over his features, and a pallor, which is not the pallor of ill-health, suffuses his face like a light cloud."

It may readily be imagined that Wagner has had to find time for a very large amount of reading, among the exigencies of his creative work. He has had to study many books to acquaint himself with the masterpieces of literature, for the selection of his dramatic material. And for the six years after the completion of *Lohengrin*, whilst abuse was being hurled upon his music in every quarter, as "the negation of art, of melody, of common-sense," he withheld himself with stern self-control from writing another bar. He expended his energies upon the production of theoretical treatises, by which he hoped to cleave a path for the passage of the "Music of the Future,"—treatises such as *Art and Revolution*, *Art and Climate*, *Opera and Drama*, *Judaism in Music*,—so complex, so learned, so abstruse, and, *bien entendu*, so deadly uninteresting to the musical in addition to the unmusical reader, that it is very much to be doubted if anyone has ever succeeded in plodding through them save the author himself. Still,

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they pre-supposed an enormous amount of study ; and although they were not written under the direct impulse of the Schopenhauer philosophy, which has so largely influenced Wagner's later theories, they tend in some manner to prepare the way for it. This philosophy, very roughly put, amounts to the statement that the musical composer is the only truly *creative* artist, because he cannot borrow anything from nature, and is shut up, like the deaf Beethoven, with his own inner consciousness, and his own — practically clairvoyant — inceptions.

This is what one may call a domesticated day, an " At Home " day with Richard Wagner. He is not obliged to go out and conduct a rehearsal with his orchestra in the Bayreuth theatre,—storming, hissing, gyrating, stamping, like one demoniacally possessed, and anon smiling sweetly and almost ceasing to move at all. He has no royal audience to attend in the palace of his devout adorer and patron, King Ludwig : he has no desire, to-day, to visit his favourite resort at Angermann's, where he is wont to " set the table in a roar " above the

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glasses of *Bairisch bier*, as he exhales innumerable jests and reminiscences. The afternoon is still delightfully warm, warm enough even for this man so singularly susceptible to damp and cold, who can hardly bear to live through the detested winter, and never, if possible, starts new work until the spring. In his favourite attitude, with his hands behind his back, thrust deep into specially-made capacious overcoat pockets, and accompanied by his dog, the composer goes out for a lonely walk, and for a silent inter-communion with Nature. This, in common with most other great musicians, he finds his most prolific time. And, slowly pacing in solitary silence, while the summer evening bathes him in light and odorous warmth, he rises into that "clarified, ethereal atmosphere" which he has described, that "ecstatic sense of isolation," which fills him with "voluptuous thrills such as we experience on a lofty Alpine summit, when with our head in the blue ocean of air, we look down on the mountain ridges and valleys beneath." And he becomes aware of mysteries,—voices and melodies penetrating to his consciousness from the innermost soul of things. One of the characters with which he is

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at present concerned—a character out of the music-drama he is creating—appears to his mind's eye—gazing, even visibly moving towards him—“which may even frighten him, but which he must endure. At last its lips move, the mouth is opened, and a voice from the spirit world,” so he himself has endeavoured to explain this transcendent experience, “tells him something quite real, entirely intelligible, but also so unheard-of . . . that it awakes him from his dream. Everything has vanished, but in his mind's ear the sounds continue, he has had an ‘idea,’ a so-called musical ‘motive.’ Heaven knows whether others may have heard it just the same or somewhat similar.” What does he care? It is his motive, given him in a perfectly legitimate way by that remarkable apparition, during the wonderful moment of his trance.

These experiences are not the property of the ordinary man: nor are they capable of intelligible explanation in lucid terms to any who have not been through them. The visions of saints and mystics, the ecstasies of devotees, the hallucinations of seers, are of the same



### THE NORNS SPINNING DESTINY.

“The three weird sisters, the Norns in their dark and filmy raiment, who, sitting in the faint grey dusk of the *Götterdämmerung*, fasten their golden cord from rock to rock, and unravel from its fibres the hidden things of future, past and present.”







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calibre, and on the same plane, with the means whereby music is vouchsafed to the musician. He dwells for what may be a moment, or a thousand years—for here time and space are obliterated as in dreams—among trailing clouds of glory, which are sound - vibrations rather than light - vibrations, and his being is as an instrument of seven strings for invisible fingers to play upon. Were it not that these occasions have by dint of repetition become natural, instead of supernatural, events, they would be more than the human mind is capable of sustaining.

Wagner returns to his house, transpierced with glorious imaginings: better and greater they seem to him than all which have hitherto been yielded him. For he is at present contemplating that noblest and abstrusest work of any, *Parsifal*, “steeped in a dense cloud of religious mysticism,” and he desires that his utterances in this, the culminating, consummate work of his skill as a master of resources, shall be fraught with actual divine inspirations,—to result in something new beyond all previous attempts toward novelty. The Norn who

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presided over his birth deposited, says he, upon his cradle, "the never-contented spirit that ever seeks the new." And the three Weird Sisters, the Norns in their dark and filmy raiment, who, sitting in the faint grey dusk of the *Götterdämmerung*, fasten their golden cord from rock to rock, and unravel from its fibres the hidden things of future, past and present,—these three grey Fates have watched above him sixty years, nor is their gift of *newness* yet outworn. A modern Perseus seeking to the Graiæ, he still invokes their benison: and still, in secret, unexpected ways, it is bestowed in marvellous fulness on him.

He sits down to spend the twilight hour, as is his wont, in quiet conversation with his wife. To her alone can he confide his most intricate hopes and schemes, and be certain of loving understanding. She is the embodiment of his dreams. She is the verification of his belief that "women are the music of life." When his hand is tired, she writes, to his dictation, the greater part of that multitude of letters in which he loves to expound and to display his views upon "tone-art," as well as those

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to more personal friends, like Liszt, who relish a gossipy epistle. Supper, about half-past seven, being over, the composer enjoys a rest in his comfortable and luxurious drawing-room, while one of Frau Wagner's daughters reads aloud for an hour or so, from some book of his selecting, and he listens, all attention: sometimes filling the room with mighty laughter, sometimes making parenthetical explanations or remarks. Occasionally he will himself read out a scene of Shakespeare (in German) with such masterly dramatic effect, that it sounds (in his own characterization of Shakespeare) "like an improvization of the highest poetic value." Or, if he is feeling merry and cheerful, he will render a comic scene, with inimitable *verve* and gaiety, and frank enjoyment of its humours.

The night is now here: the Villa Wahnfried is brilliantly lighted up from top to bottom. Unconquerable drowsiness assails each faculty of this indomitable man, and with reluctance he brings to a close a day which has been so full of work and pleasure. The great red lamp burns cosily in his bedroom, and the summer stars shine down upon Bayreuth, as his wife

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goes hand in hand with him to bid their sleeping boy good - night. "O du, mein holder Abendstern!" (O thou, my lovely evening-star!) he softly sings to her, in the well-known melody from *Tannhäuser*, as an almost palpable atmosphere of love and happiness surrounds the sleeping and the waking. Richard Wagner, young in spite of all his years, — Titanic in spite of all his troubles, — has surely earned a night's repose.



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